

Sex may be better for mature audiences: study

17 December 2009, By Jamie Hanlon

(PhysOrg.com) -- New university students might be thinking about exploring another rite of passage when they get to campus: the joy of sex. However, depending on their level of maturity, some students may find less joy than others.

New research from University of Alberta psychologists has found that emotionally mature [students](#) may get more positive benefits from sex than their less-mature counterparts.

In a study on emotional experiences and sexual behaviours, which included oral and penetrative intercourse, U of A researcher and [doctoral student](#) Andrea Dalton and her supervisor Nancy Galambos surveyed first-year students over an eight-month period and found that maturity has an influence on the emotions connected with sexual experience.

"Students who are essentially on the correct developmental timeline with respect to maturity experience sexual behaviour in a positive way," said Dalton. "Immature students, in particular, seem to have negative experiences associated with their sexual behaviour."

Dalton notes that some previous research has viewed [sexual activity](#) in young people as inherently negative. Her study points out that for youth who are "on track" emotionally and psychologically, sex may not necessarily be a bad thing. She says that her findings point to the notion that the mature students were, in fact, ready for sex and the psychological and emotional outcomes of that behaviour. The mature students, she notes, benefitted positively by engaging in sexual behaviour.

The study showed there was an increase in negative emotion for the immature students who had penetrative sex. But the same result was not present in members of that group who engaged in oral sex, a finding Dalton says may suggest that

students might consider oral sex to be a less serious sexual behaviour and, thus, may have less of an overall negative effect on mood.

While it is the dream of many students to move out on their own, the study findings show that move's effect on emotion was not as utopian as one might think. Dalton's study indicated that students who were living outside of their family home environment reported having more negative emotions than those students who lived at home. The transition to university and moving from home into new social surroundings is filled with stressors, says Dalton. However, sexual intimacy could be serving as a coping mechanism for chasing the blues away.

"There seems to be some kind of compensatory effect of sexual behaviour that brings that negative emotion right down," she said. "That was unexpected but interesting, and was another side of what the relation between emotion and sexual relations might mean for students."

Whereas some students may see Dalton's research and determine that sex is the ultimate litmus test for maturity, Dalton cautions engaging in sexual behaviour without weighing one's personal situation, their level of readiness, the potential risks—such as sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy—and motivations for engaging in sexual activity.

"Sexual behaviour can just be one component of this big puzzle that kids are experiencing as part of the transition to university," said Dalton. "It definitely shouldn't be interpreted as a generally negative behaviour."

"It is a goal of healthy human development to include healthy sexuality as well."

Provided by University of Alberta

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